

In Which Steve Gets Stuck Shopping by **maidenofendor**

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Summary: Steve has been tasked with taking Max and El shopping for dresses. Poor thing. Yes I do really suck at summaries, it's better then it sounds. (Part 3 up now)

1. Chapter 1

Steve was fully, wholly and utterly screwed.

He had battled a demogorgon, survived a heartbreak, fought demodogs, brawled with Billy and dragged all the kids through it all, and nobody had lost any limbs. So why did *this* seem like the ultimate death sentence?

What was poor Steve going into with such a poor fate? Shopping. With two teenage girls.

While he was practically an adoptive mother to all the kids, Max and Eleven both had their own respective soft spots in his heart, like the others. Max, because of her hell of a step brother, and El because of her shadowy loneliness that tailed her and only struck when she was lacking a companion. They were still kids, young kids that didn't deserve the shit they were given. So Steve now matched the "Mother Goose" shirt the Party had jokingly given him for saving their asses.

He shook off the soft fuzzy feelings that came with the kids in mind and focused back on the road. No way in hell was Max ever driving his car again. He remembered being half conscious and confused to find two blocks taped to the pedals because her legs hadn't been long enough to reach. That, in his mind, definitely determined that she had been far from qualified in her little adventure.

El released a shriek from the back of the car, dragging Steve off memory lane and automatically scanned the back of the car in the review, looking for danger. No danger, only Max with a devilish grin and a cocked brow facing Eleven, who was flushed beyond recognition. Steve didn't want to know what Max could have said to sweet little El to gather such a reaction.

It was unfortunate that the mall was so far from Hawkins. Maybe he should have just thrown the keys at Max, along with the money the Chief had handed him ("If she sees something that she likes and it doesn't fit this, I'll pay you back") While Steve seriously doubted that Eleven had taste in dresses that exceeded \$450, he had accepted the cash and left with both girls, glaring at Hopper who laughed at his

misfortune. Hopper needed to be in the city for a few days and was taking Joyce, and had hosted Max for several days before dumping them with Steve to find the dresses for the upcoming Freshman prom sort of thing. Nancy was away with Mrs. Wheeler and wouldn't return until the day of the prom/dance whatever. Ted was useless and that left Jonathan and Billy, who were also useless, and Jonathan was taking the boys today instead of the girls. Steve would run through the town in whatever dress and shoes the girls selected before he would even think of letting them go with Billy.

He supposed either Dustin's mother or Lucas' could have taken them, but Lucas' was caring for Holly in Karen's absence and Dustin's, while she was a lovely women and adored Steve, had interesting choice in clothing.

Poor damned boy. He couldn't catch a fucking break.

Steve felt a pair of scrawny little arms wrap around his shoulders and over his chest, warm little breaths on the side of his face. He smiled, recognizing Eleven's impulsive affection. With her being forever grateful for the little things after her lab upbringing, he had grown accustomed to her random hugs and need to be around him.

"Seatbelt El," Steve said, also impulsive in the maternal instinct way.

She slouched back, sulking as she clicked her seatbelt across herself. Suddenly suspicious, Steve casually without looking, praying he didn't sound like an idiot grumbled,

"You too Max."

He heard a huff and the click of the buckle. Score one to mom.

Enforcing car safety had been practically futile as they had just pulled into the mall's parking lot. They spilled out of the vehicle and into the dress section of the department store.

Steve groaned at the glitter and bright colors that met him. El slipped one hand into his and the other into Max's, out of nerves and overwhelmed senses. Max just looked like Steve had handed her a live demo-dog.

A saleswomen practically pounced on them.

"Hi there! I'm Jen! How can I help you?"

Steve examined his "kids". They looked more scared of the saleswomen than they had of the store itself. He met the woman's eye and gave his best puppy smile, which had the desired affect and he saw her eye him a little closer, well almost desired affect. He wasn't looking for a girl, just a pair of dresses.

"You know, I think we are ok, just gonna find some dresses, don't really need any help."

El out a little breath of relief and Steve knew he had made the right choice.

"Jen's face faltered ever so slightly but she retained a smile and simply said "Alright then, just head over to that half of the floor, they should have the proper sizing for your girls."

So they crossed the floor and made it to even more dresses.

"Ok guys, lets narrow this down, divide and conquer and all that. What color do you want?"

Max spoke for El before El could open her mouth. "El should wear something bright, because she wore dark blue to everything else just because Mike liked it so much the first time."

Steve nodded, scanning the technicolor options, alongside some still bright but more wearable shades. "How bright?"

Max huffed and dragged her hands down her face. "Not neon."

Great. That knocked out a grand two racks out of a million.

"What about you Max, oh great color specifier?"

She glared, before shrugging. Wait did she look *insecure*?

El spoke boldly after being shut down. "Green is very pretty with her hair."

Max scrunched her nose. Ok, so no green for Max.

El frowned at Max's reaction but went on "How about blue-green?"

Steve knew something about colors. "Teal?" El nodded.

Max sighed. "Ok."

And thus the hunt began. And with the insanity this was, Steve regretted not bringing his bat.

Within five seconds he realized he didn't know the girl's sizes, and he doubted they knew them themselves.

"Eleven, Max!"

The pair left the rack they had been pawing through and came to where Steve stood. "Do either of you know your sizes?"

Two heads shook. Steve sighed and pulled dresses labeled 2, 4, 6, and 8 (Eleven eyed the number 8, rather than the dress attached to it), and dumped them on Max's head. She tore them off and plopped them into El's arms.

"Go to the dressing room, put all of these on, Eleven it's fine, you don't have to actually wear this one, it's just for size, and report back which number fits best."

Max and El walked into the hall of dressing rooms, with Steve awkwardly walking after them and finding a small stool to sit on outside their door.

Within five minutes the pair exited the room, El with a dress in hand. Steve pulled out the tag, noting a 4 for both of them. Well at least that was out of the way.

They returned to the racks, the girls pulling several dresses and stacking them over one arm. Steve moved to another row of racks and hunted for some "bright" colors the were not "neon" and would fit El. A lemon yellow, sky blue, a layered red and a aggressively shaded orange piled onto his right arm. He then skimmed the entire row for anything resembling teal. When both arms were weighted down

equally, he wandered back to the girls. The both had a handful of options over their non dominant arms and gladly took what Steve had produced and took off for the dressing room. Steve though it was weird that they had to help each other but "I can't reach the zipper in the back and El isn't allowed to do it herself because she'll use her powers and bleed on the clothes"

Sorry I asked.

The door swung open and El stepped out in a strapless green dress. It was nice, but it didn't seem to please the girl.

She looked at him waiting for his judgement. Damn it. Damned Steve can't catch a break.

"It's nice, but I think you could do better." Eleven nodded, pleased with his answer and slammed the door behind her.

Max awkwardly shuffled out of the room in a fluffy, glittery dress that hugged and fluffed all over the place. Both mutually shook their heads and she retreated back.

Eleven wouldn't even come out in the yellow dress because "Holy shit El Mike will actually fall over dead if he sees that much skin."

She rejected several of her own choices, along with the orange dress Steve had selected. Max rejected most of the dresses in general, and wouldn't let El into the blue dress because it reminded her of every single other dress Eleven had worn recently.

Max slinked out of the room much to Steve's dismay. The dress cut lower then low in the front, had no back, was missing part of the sides and had silts running up every side of the skirt. El stood behind her, humming the theme song to a spicy soap she was so keen on watching. Steve rolled his eyes and kept them up at the ceiling.

"No Max."

She grinned, enjoying making him uncomfortable.

"But Steve, I look like Marcella from.."

"No Maxine."

She faked a huff and stormed back into the dressing room with El giggling in the background. Steve whined. Why couldn't have Hopper taken them? Max wouldn't have pulled such a stunt with the Chief around. Actually, she probably would.

Max let out a loud coo, which was very unlike her to make any noise resembling that but he had a feeling El had put on the dress they would be leaving with.

Eleven stepped out in the soft red dress that Steve had picked for her. It hit halfway down her shin in a waterfall of red tulle and the bodice glimmered, was form fitting and had soft sleeves that were made of the skirt's tulle and covered her shoulders, cutting off right 1/4 of the way down her upper arm. She had a splitting smile and turned slowly, her own red Cinderella. Steve smiled. She deserved to be a little Cinderella even if her prince charming happened to be the awkward Mike Wheeler.

He grinned and gave her a thumbs up, which made her smile even wider and she bounced back to where she came from. Moments later she returned, dressed back in her/Hopper's flannel and jeans, with her dress draped carefully over her arm. She set it gently next to Steve and hurried back to Max.

Max emerged from the room with a soft smile playing on her face. It was of course, teal and it hit just above the floor. The skirt was soft and silky but it still had a some volume like El's because of the long layered ruffles. The top of it wrapped around her body, and had little cutouts, none enough to earn a disapproving glare from "Mother". The neckline dipped but not terribly. Steve looked at Max's expression which was searching his for approval. He smiled.

"It's perfect Max."

She smiled, and then hurried to change.

They left the floor, finally, dresses in arm and payment made. As expected, El's dress was only \$150 and no where near what Hopper had prepared for. But that left her with options for her shoes and

necklace. Max had payed for her own dress, because she understood how money worked which still was a slightly challenging for El.

The trio dropped two floors and walked amongst the many shoe options. El was quick to choice some two inch black pumps which were short enough for her and had small gold stones shimmering along the sides. Max surprised them both by selecting some taller heels with silver glitter dusted over them.

Jewelry was a little dramatic.

El slammed her wrist up onto the counter, where the infamous Hopper blue bracelet was twisted over her wrist. It had some serious meaning to El because she refused to part with it for a matching set of necklace and bracelet. This frustrated the women behind the counter because most necklaces came in a shiny metal and clashed with the blue band. She dug through everything she had and found a simple gold bead on a thin chain that satisfied Eleven. Necklace #1 check.

Max chose a thicker silver band to wear around her neck, with a bracelet that matched.

Was that it? Were they really done?

They left the store with their purchases and loaded back into the car.

Steve began to pull out of the parking lot when a small idea flew into his mind.

"Seatbelts girls."

Two huffs and identical clicks responded.

(Comment if you want Steve to help get them ready)

2. Chapter 2

(thank you to everyone who reviewed my last chapter- my ego went up about eleven miles)

(Anyway, as requested)

Steve was starting to seriously consider that his life may be some sort of fucked up soap opera. Complete with fights, hormones, conspiracies and he was just the beautiful, damned star, destined to suffer to entertain the bored housewives on the other side of the screen.

Of he couldn't get out of this. Because the mall adventures just weren't enough to get the ratings up.

Fast forward from last week's shopping extravaganza. Today was the day of the prom thing (nobody was really explaining this event to him) and he was screwed. Like really screwed. Any fool can grab some fabric off a metal rack and stuff a teenager into it, but to do the actual preparing? Not possible for this fool.

However could this have happened? Hopper and Joyce's trip had been extended a few days (big mystery why) and they wouldn't return until later that night, Nancy and her mother had contacted something awful on their trip and were currently locked in Nancy's room to prevent contamination to the kids that had been enjoying a giant week long sleepover in the basement (and a few extra long movie nights at Steve's) and couldn't even lift their heads without vomiting everything. According to a heaving Nancy over the phone, they hadn't eaten anything in almost two days and now were managing to puke pure watery blood. Nasty. So the girl's promised primpers were indisposed. Ted was useless as always, as were Jonathan and Billy, with Jonathan helping the boys and not knowing a tube of lipstick from a toilet paper roll and Billy not to be trusted not to strangle Max with a headband.

Steve had gotten desperate and went to both Lucas' mother (Baby sister birthday party) and Dustin's mother (new kitten would be accompanying her on a train ride to several cities so they could

sightsee together) and his attempts were fruitless. All of his female classmates either looked like trash anyway or were interested in other things that had more to do with Steve than the girls. Everywhere he went was a dead end.

And that was how this poor soap star found himself staring at two girls seated on the end of his bed with a several bags worth of cosmetics (Steve raised a brow at El "Didn't steal, Nancy gave after puking") and hair products (Steve raised his other brow at Max "It's better you don't know") (Eleven reassured him it was also Nancy's) and he was stumped.

Eleven sighed and opened the pre-packed kit Nancy had prepared for this very purpose as they were supposed to be getting ready at the cabin, but unfortunately for everyone involved plans changed. On top of the bag were two bottles of nail polish as well as a little carton of "Press on nails" which Max snatched and declared that "No way in hell am I sitting and waiting for that shit to dry." El and Steve shrugged in defeat and Eleven instead selected a glittery gold bottle which she pried open and carefully layered over her nails. Steve was impressed. He doubted nail art was lab etiquette.

El looked up from her project. "Nancy and Mike taught me." Steve opened his mouth in question, which El quickly fixed with "Nancy really taught both of us, he made Eggos and painted my pinky". The fondness in her voice made Steve smile, and also caused him to mentally note to ensure he supervised more (you can take the mother away from Steve but you can't take it out of him).

With Max's new sticky nails setting in, and El blowing on her fingertips, Steve had the opportunity to remove the next layer of the kit, (Nancy, being Nancy had placed thin sheets of paper to separate the steps- praise her strange ways) This was makeup, he was positive of that. He examined the two compacts, one was a little heavier and had no label on the outside but the second one was labeled "Base Powder". Ok, so this was the base. This piece came with a soft brush that the assumed was to distribute product. Upon opening both products, he found one was ever so slightly tanner then the other. He deemed the fairer of the two to be destined for Max and pulled her face close to dust the powder over her entire face. Taking a step back, he quickly fixed a bit that was unblended and was pleased to see that

her skin did indeed look smoother, more balanced. Maybe he should get some of this stuff.

While he repeated the process on Eleven, Max peeled back the next sheet of paper and pulled two more compacts out. She turned the first one and read aloud "blusher". Steve nodded as he rubbed the last of El's base in. He took the blush and opened both as he had done with the first pair of compacts. One was a softer pink, the other more berry colored. He went with the rule of thumb he had been following and chose the lighter shade as Max's.

"If someone is to blush, it shows in their cheeks. Correct?"

Both girls nodded.

He took the brush he used to apply the base and dipped it slightly into the pan. He then brought it up to eye level, satisfied with the amount of pigment at the end of the bristles, swept it up Max's cheekbones and lightly over the bridge of her nose so it matched. He swept over his work again with the empty brush to mix it in with the base. He gestured for Eleven to come up to him and he took the darker shade and swirled it over her cheeks and button nose. Max had wandered off and began to fidget with Steve's radio, earning music to spill out of its speaker. Eleven dug through her little bag and pulled out her own personal walkie talkie. Those damn things.

She spun the dial until it buzzed with life. Sure enough Micheal Wheeler's voice sounded at the end of it.

"Hey love."

Max and Steve exchanged glances.

"Hi Mike."

"Are you getting ready, over"

"Yes"

"You have to say over when your done talking, over"

"I know, over"

Max rolled her eyes.

A ruckus and a scream could be heard at the other end of the line.

"Don't worry about that El, it's just Dustin and Will fighting over a brush."

A large crash sounded with a few words that Steve would be reprimanding the kids for later.

Eleven giggled and Mike's own laugh warbled through the connection.

El examined her onlookers when Max let out an impatient cough.

"Mike, I will see you later, over"

"Ok El, I miss you"

"I miss you too, love you, over"

Steve's eyes almost popped out of his head.

"Love you too, over and out."

The silence that followed was an awkward one.

Eleven tried to play it casual and picked at the corner of the next layer, careful not to damage her new manicure. Out came an eyeshadow palette. Oh god. The housewives were practically screaming by now.

Steve took a deep breath and opened the thin box. Twenty four shades blinked back at him. Both girls looked nervously at him.

He picked up the various brushes that came in the layer with the palette and examined the pair before him. Suddenly, with the flash of Eleven's gold encrusted pumps behind them, he had a gleam of an idea. Steve gestured towards her, bringing her forward. He dipped into the not sparkly beige shade and smudged it into the crease of her eye, scraping at what he remembered from watching Nancy and his mother with their own eyes. He then took another non-glittery

brown, this one darker and rubbed it out from her eye, the outer corner. Lastly, he took a dip into the gold pigment and applied it into the center of her lid. She blinked her eyes open and examined his work in the mirror, smiling, pleased with his work. She threw her arms around his neck and Steve's little Mother Goose heart warmed.

Ready to tackle Max's eyes, he repeated what he had done with the matte browns and chose to skip the gold. Max had a less affectionate reaction, but she was clearly happy with the result and smiled at him.

The next sheet revealed a thin tube of "Mascara". Lucky for Steve, Max had used this product before and taught El how to use it, so Steve could sit back and breathe for a minute. Eleven's lashes fluttered long and dark now, and Max's stood out against her pale skin.

They had reached the bottom of the bag and all that was left were about five lipsticks and a trio of lipgloss tubes. The phone rang. Steve pulled it from the wall while El and Max dug through their lip options.

"Steve?"

"Nancy?"

"Hey Steve.." Her voice was cut off with the sound of her gagging, "Ineedyou to chaperone since I can't please and thank you bye."

The line went dead.

Well, it would be him or Hopper and if Eleven were to have a chance at even looking at Mike it would have to be Steve.

He turned back to the girls who each held a lip color and a gloss.

Max had leaned over to the mirror and was carefully filling in her lips with a soft pink much like her blush and Eleven was copying her motions with a darker ruby that was more similar to the shade of her dress.

Gloss was layered over the lipstick (Max chose a frosty shade with Eleven opted for a clear gloss) and the makeup was done. Great. That

was an entire eighth of the damn battle. Hair was next.

A straightening iron, a curling wand and several combs and hair pins and elastics littered the bed.

"Keeping curls." Declared Eleven, who knew how much they were appreciated by Mike.

Straightening iron was now useless.

"I want soft curls." Muttered Max, utterly embarrassed to have a feminine wish.

Steve, now determined to make the pair fully satisfied with their hair, plugged the wand into the wall and waited for it to heat up. In the time he had, he went to El and pulled hair from the crown of her head, and split it into thirds. He began to weave it under the other strands, determined to mimic the half up crown he had once mastered as a joke on Nancy's head. Pulling soft tendrils into the plait felt so incredibly motherly he almost choked. Can't get much more mothering then braiding your daughters hair. His braid continued around her head until she had a halo of her own hair and the rest was left curly and free.

She touched it as he pinned all of it down and smiled.

"Thank you Steve. Very beautiful."

The curling wand was waiting for him when he seated Max and tentatively picked up a chunk of hair. Braiding was easy because he considered braiding to be a life skill and not only limited to hair. But curling? Maybe a wrapped gift's ribbon. There was no other purpose the skill showed. He ran the iron down a strip of hair. Well that didn't work. Steve let out a hiss as he touched it, checking for heat. Definitely hot. He wrapped it around the wand instead, and when he released it, a spiral held. Perfect.

El ran off to change while he worked on perfecting Max's hair. When all of her hair hung in curls, she grinned, gathered up her belongings and ran up after Eleven. Steve cleared everything off his bed, packed everything into the bags they had come in, dropped both used

lipsticks into the purse they were bringing so they could fix it later. (Only if it came off with food or drink because there was *no* other scenario that lipstick was at risk. Better not be.)

Steve walked down the large staircase and waited at the bottom with a Polaroid camera in hand, ready for the girls to come down.

The large doors shook with a knock and Steve turned to pry them open. Outside stood all four boys and Jonathan, all dressed in their little suits. Dustin had skipped the hair tips Steve had supplied him with and Will had fixed part of his shitty haircut. Jonathan's hair still sucked. So did his whole person in general.

Mike had stepped in and was scanning the room for any signs of his telekinetic girlfriend, while Lucas, not quite so bold, hung back and casually hunted for traces of Max. A click at the top of the stairs snapped everyone's attention upwards and the doors opened to reveal Max and El, all dolled up.

Eleven was pretty much floating on air as she glided down in her little red dress, heels and teeth gleaming. Mike's mouth dropped open, which Dustin jokingly pushed back up. Max, less high on excitement, still moved with a unusual grace down the steps, teal dress exploding against her fair skin and hair. She gave a closed mouth smile which soon melted into a more usual smirk at Lucas' reaction.

El hurried into Mike's arms, who held her out in awe, taking her in as though she were his first sighting of a sunset. They met in the middle, burying their faces into each other's shoulders. Steve supposed they still hadn't recovered from the whole 353 days thing. Fair enough.

Max just leaned against Lucas, who was looking at her with a mixture of "You're some kind of alien but your really hot so.."

Will and Dustin awkwardly shuffled around Jonathan who hadn't moved from the doorway. El broke her everlasting eye contact to wave at Steve, more so towards his camera.

He quickly snapped some photos of the whole group, the ones with dates (only one of the seven he took of the lovebirds were they

actually looking at the camera and not each other), Max and Eleven together and some individual more modelish ones of the girls. When he had gone through all of his film they all left the entryway and stepped out into the night.

Steve felt all of the warm butterflies and little misty eyed when El and Max slipped their hands into his (granted El hadn't broken contact with Mike but that was the other hand) and leaned on either side of him. In true mothering fashion, he held the kids close, expanding their group hug to hold them all (Jonathan not included) until they parted and loaded up into cars to head off to the dance.

(Y'all know the drill, comment if you want Steve to chaperone this shebang)

3. Chapter 3

(Your wish is my command, Part 3!)

(Thank you for all the supportive comments!)

A detour of sorts was in action. Hopper had sent code that he and Joyce had returned and he wanted to see Eleven before she went off to her dance. So Steve had pulled over, waved Jonathan over, explained the situation and promised to get the girls to the dance on time. Great.

Steve turned up the road to the cabin, listening to the soft chatter in the backseat. El, had been fully pissed that anyone was preventing her from attending the dance ASAP and was bouncing in her seat from anticipation. Max had quieted down after the initial rush and was just going along for the ride.

Steve stopped the car and twisted the key out, and hurried out of his door before the girls had even undone their seatbelt. He ran around the car to open the door for them, like some sort of fancy chauffeur. El grinned and took his offered hand to exit the vehicle. Max did not copy the set example and just rolled her eyes at his antics. Steve slammed the door and followed them up the porch. Eleven preformed the "special knock" (useless now with no known threats) and several locks clicked open. Hopper stood in the open doorway, Joyce several feet behind him.

"Look at you kid, all dolled up."

Eleven grinned and hugged him, careful with her hair. Hopper held her at arms length, confused at the sight before him.

"I thought Nancy was sick, who did all this?"

El's grin widened. "Steve did it!"

With the look on Hopper's face, Steve felt his whole masculinity had dropped several levels in the Chief's book.

El stepped further into the house to be cooed over by Joyce, and Max

stepped forward.

Hop surprised Steve by pulling her into a hug.

"You look good too Max."

She smiled and scrambled after El.

Hopper rubbed a hand over his face and stared at Steve.

"I tried really hard to get out of it Chief, I've never done any of that before." Steve grumbled, trying to save his dying reputation in the eyes of Jim Hopper.

The Chief just slapped him on the back and called for the girls to get going. They all met at the door and after some goodbyes and "If the Wheeler boy tries anything, public use of powers is permitted" they were off again.

They loaded back up to into the car and Eleven's excitement leveled up a few notches.

It didn't take long for them to pull into the school's parking lot, where they repeated their fancy car exit, with Max participating this time, and walked up to the school. In the entryway, Steve marked himself as a chaperone on a lined sheet and walked the girls towards the event. He walked over to the other chaperones ho awkwardly hung around the edges of the dance and talked.

He kept his eyes trained on both girls, El who made a beeline for Mike and Max who tailed her. Mike and El gazed all gooey at each other and immediately stepped out to dance. Dustin was talking up some new girl and Will had captured the attention of some blonde who was following him around. Max and Lucas tried to appear much cooler then everyone else (failure because, well Steve was here, obviously) and stood leaning near drinks and food.

Steve scanned the dance, and its windows and doors, for any threats to his little family. Nothing yet. Mike and El were hopping around the crowd with stupid grins, never breaking their eye contact. El was easy to spot, she was the only one in such a bold red. And Mike was always inches from her so he was easy to spot. Dustin was loud and

had gathered quite the cluster of girls, so he was easy to track. Will was constantly moving now to escape whoever was so interested in him so looking for a little dart of a person was the best technique to find him.

Max and Lucas were nowhere to be found. Damn damn damnit. Steve left his perch to hunt them down. He did not trust either of them, no matter how cool and mature they thought they were. Actually, that was what he was afraid of. They were no longer lining the refreshment table, or around the edges of the room. Steve left the dance to go skim the boy's bathroom and peek his head into the girls (nothing but a sobbing mess surrounded by her girlfriends) but no Max or Lucas appeared.

He ran back to the party happening in the gym and took a mental head count of his kids. Dustin hadn't moved, Will was cornered and Eleven and Mike were dancing together, much closer now. He would have to fix that later but he had bigger fish to fry at the moment.

He was about to go check some unused closets and classrooms when he spotted a flash of red hair in the crowd that was cluttering the dance floor. He pushed his way around the perimeter of the crowd and sure enough, Max and Lucas had given into the music and were dancing together. Steve heaved a sigh of relief and leaned against the wall again.

Over the next hour or so, he was rather bored, fidgeting with some streamers and eating pretzels. He had sat with Dustin for awhile and had drastically assisted in expanding his clump of females. He'd rescued Will from whoever had been so persistent and talked with the little weirdo for a awhile. He didn't dare even try to distract the lovebirds from each other and he was afraid to bother the house of cards that was Max and Lucas together, one touch and it might all go to shit.

Only an hour remained of the dance and the kids were still going. God, the people at his age would have all run off to some after party or at least have gone out and away from the watchful. Eye of the adults but this age was more cautious, less trusting of the outside world. Steve frowned at the lack of innocent excitement that came with rebelling against the rules. These kids just worshipped anything

that promised safety. This gained another huff from Steve who was getting very bored very quickly. He checked the clock. 10:27. Not long now.

How had Nancy even considered this a good waste of her time? This was boring as hell. Jesus. Well she was kinda boring anyway and Jonathan hadn't helped that but still, this had nothing appealing to it except that he could watch over his little kids. The entire mood in the room shifted when the music turned slow and soft. Half of the kids left the floor, the ones who hadn't attended the dance with a date, but the designated dancing area was still full of people. This was when Mama Steve got a little more protective. He found Max and Lucas dancing awkwardly at an arms length, which he was completely fine with until Max got bold and planted a kiss on Lucas' dumb mouth. This did not settle well with Steve. He was about to go and break the pair apart when he saw a flash of red that reminded him to keep an eye on El.

She was much much closer to Mike than Max to Lucas, with her chin on his shoulder and bodies pressed together as they swayed. This was little close for him comfort but at least they weren't kissing. He turned back to Max and Lucas only to find them missing. Again. But this time it was worse because they had actually done something concerning to their "Mother". He hurried back out of the celebration and scanned the bathrooms again, only to return empty handed (poor kid was still crying in there) and so he went off on a little adventure to find them again. He went off down several hallways, with no Max and Lucas in sight. He burst out the doors on the side of the building that led to a darker corner that few found in their time there. Sure enough, Max and Lucas were up against a wall, clothes still intact but mouths hadn't left each other. Ick.

Well, mama had to break this up.

"Maxine!"

They broke apart and flew to opposite sides of the little alley. Steve crossed his arms and glared.

"Max, inside now."

She huffed and stomped back into the building with Steve hot on her heels.

Lucas awkwardly shuffled back into the dance while Steve herded Max off to a secluded corner.

"What were you thinking kid?"

She scoffed and crossed her arms.

"I was thinking enough."

"Max, you're too young for this stuff."

"I am not, if anything I'm way old enough for the stuff, all the shit that went down, this past few years? That made me old enough."

Steve choked. She didn't deserve anything that had happened. He just opened his arms and she buried her face into his coat.

They stood like that for a while, Max taking comfort in him, and he was thinking of how much he wanted to tear apart every Demogorgon, every lab worker, every bully, every abusive brother, everyone who had ever even considered hurting his kids with his bare hands.

God damnit these kids held his heart.

They walked slowly back to the dance, more than a little heartbroken. Steve's whole damn heart was shattered every single time something happened to one of these little guys. And a whole lot had happened. He wondered how much of his heart he could piece back together and how much was crushed too finely to fit back into place.

They returned to the dance, and Max swayed off to the group of kids. Steve had slumped against the wall, worn through and did a head check again. Lucas, Max, Dustin, Will, and..

Shit. Poor damned Steve.

In the center of the dance floor, surrounded by others, were Mike and

Eleven, and of course, they were kissing.

Damn it.

Steve was so screwed.

(Thank you so so so much for all of the support that came with the story!)

Leave any ideas or stories you want to see me do in a review/comment and I'll do my best to make it happen!